

W. D. Hodgson
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L' U M I L E P I A N T A .

FOR THE CHILDREN'S SAKE.

DEAR STUDENTS,

As one of your Vice-Presidents, I have been asked to contribute a short paper to your Magazine. This I am glad to do as, unfortunately, though I was at Ambleside this Christmas, I missed seeing both students and ex-students. When I called at the House of Education I found it still lacked a few days to the end of the holidays, so I only saw the "nest" without the "birds" in it, but very comfortable I thought it. I had the pleasure of meeting both Miss Mason and Miss Hodgson, and heard much of all that had been done during the previous term. My last meeting with you had been in your old quarters, where there was hardly room for you all, and I was entertained by seeing some cleverly-acted impromptu charades given by the students. Also one afternoon I was able to be present at two language lessons. Now, as I know the ex-students ought to try to keep up their languages after they leave the House of Education, I have been wondering if any of them would like to take part in a scheme of a friend of mine, Mademoiselle Gonin, who is a professor at the Girls' Lycée at Marseilles. When I was there some little time ago she told me how interested she was in promoting correspondence between English and French girls; they were to write to each other alternately, first in French and then in English, and to correct each other's letters. This lady is Professor of English, having been in England some time, and is most anxious to help her French pupils by giving them a little variety in their work. Mademoiselle Gonin has pupils of all ages, so there is no difficulty about finding a suitable correspondent. I have been successful in finding three schools in the north near us to take up the idea, and many are the English and French girls who, though they may never meet, are helping each other to improve by seeing the idioms really used which, when only met with in an exercise, convey so little meaning to many of us. This correspondence has not only been carried on by girls in schools, but several young ladies are also taking part in it. I thought perhaps some of the ex-students might like in their spare time to write to a French friend, or might like to introduce the idea into the family where they are teaching. If so, I should be glad if they will write to Mademoiselle Gonin, 48, Boulevard de la Madeleine, Marseilles, France, and mention my name in writing. I need not say that great care is taken in choosing the correspondent.

I am glad to find that the ordinary stay at the House of Education has been extended to two years. I think this is a decided advantage, and I hope very much that ex-students, whenever they have a chance, will return every now and again to their old home, so that they may keep in touch with all that is going on there, and learn any new methods that have been introduced, keeping their own ideas from getting rusty, for I have seen many teachers starting off very gaily at first becoming dreary teachers after a little time, perhaps because they had not met with much encouragement from those whose children they are teaching, or from being out of touch with any kindred spirit. These same teachers, if they could return to the hive from time to time, would have fresh energy put into them. I should also advise those who can put by a little money for a summer holiday trip, not always to take it out in going to some English sea-side place, where often you have to pay a great deal to be very uncomfortable, but to go over the water either to France or to Germany, where, if you set to work the right way, you can live very moderately and be most comfortable. You will come home feeling refreshed and with plenty of things to think about, instead of the old ones you were so tired of, and it is surprising on coming back to harness, after a change of this sort, how the worries that seemed so bad will have all melted away. In teaching it must always be remembered there is much brain work, and if this useful organ has too much strain on it, it causes its owner to become irritable and useless as a teacher. Therefore I advocate for those who can take it thorough change. I feel confident more could take it if they made up their minds to find a way to do so. It may take a little contriving, but still it can be done, and I have seen the beneficial results.

I hope also that you keep up with all that is happening in the world and read a paper every day, that it may not be said of any of you, as it was when I asked a friend of mine how she liked her governess, "Oh, she is an excellent teacher—very good to the children, but takes no interest in anything outside the schoolroom; she is a very uninteresting companion, as she never opens a paper and knows nothing of what is going on." I should like to mention that several times, when travelling about either in England or Ireland, I have heard ladies mention that they have a "treasure" who is teaching their children. On enquiry, I have found the treasure was one of *our* students.

Hoping we may *always* have reason to be proud of our students,

I remain,

Your sincere friend,

EDITH M. ARNOLD-FORSTER.

Cathedine,

Burley in Wharfedale,

Leeds, June 1st, 1898.

KEEP KEENNESS.

CUSTOM, convention, and tradition, these are the time-honoured supports of nine-tenths of our conduct in life.

Life is not long enough for every one to find out for himself a new way of doing everything, and most of us are rightly content to follow the practice of our grandmother in the art of sucking eggs. The use of conventional methods has the enormous advantage of saving time and labour. What is gained, however, may be, and often is, squandered without profit.

Those who carry their adherence to custom so far that they make no effort to understand anything of the principles upon which their acts depend become, at the best, machines. The shortcomings of a machine are (1) that it is not alive, and only life can impart life; and (2) that it is not easily adapted to varying circumstances. By following customary methods for the most part, time may be gained for studying some one or two important principles of our profession, either with the view of testing the validity of them or for the purpose of applying them with greater effect.

No one is more exposed to the temptation of doing his work in a perfunctory manner than the teacher. In the first place, the subject matter is hackneyed, and therefore wanting in the excitement which novelty supplies; and, in the next place, the progress of the scholars from day to day is so slow that it resembles "marking time," or travelling by a market train on a cross-country railway. The parents of children offer in many cases little encouragement to the teacher and no sympathy with the tediousness of the occupation. They are rather apt to think that there are some things children must suffer, as nature and custom direct. Children must, it is thought, have the measles, and must be taught whatever fashion has dictated as suitable for the schoolroom. When grown up, children will enjoy immunity from juvenile complaints, and be released from the tedium of the schoolroom and its conventional discipline and routine.

The atmosphere of the schoolroom, like the atmosphere of the workshop, is not a healthy one for spontaneous growth-development. Children are not allowed to grow like hedgerow elms or park trees, but must be clipped like yews into all sorts of fancy shapes which the gardener's art has observed for centuries.